

VZCZCXRO5938
PP RUEHAG RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHKUK RUEHROV
DE RUEHLB #1234/01 2341716
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 211716Z AUG 08
FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2824
INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE
RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 2770
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO 3015
RHMFISS/CDR USCENCOM MACDILL AFB FL
RHEHAAA/NSC WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BEIRUT 001234

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR NEA/FO, NEA/ELA
ALSO FOR IO ACTING A/S HOOK AND PDAS WARLICK
USUN FOR KHALILZAD/WOLFF/SCHEDLBAUER
NSC FOR ABRAMS/SINGH/YERGER/MCDERMOTT

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/20/2018

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [PINR](#) [UNSC](#) [MOPS](#) [MARR](#) [IZ](#) [LE](#)

SUBJECT: LEBANON: SINIORA'S TRIP TO IRAQ: INVESTMENT; ARAB
SUPPORT

REF: A. BEIRUT 1166
[1](#)B. BAGHDAD 2298

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires a.i. William K. Grant for reasons 1.4
(b) and (d).

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) PM advisor Rola Nouredine deemed Prime Minister Fouad Siniora's August 20 trip to Iraq a success and enthusiastically spoke of the future investment opportunities between the two countries. Noting to the Charge on August 21 that, "The earlier we get in, the better deals we will get," Nouredine relayed that Lebanese Finance Minister Mohammed Chatah and his Iraqi counterpart agreed to form separate committees to follow up on energy, tax and investment ideas raised during the trip. She said Siniora had set a deadline for completing agreements, suggesting that he return to Baghdad "during Ramadan" to sign them. Nouredine anticipated an improvement in diplomatic relations, hinting that Lebanon may send an ambassador to its embassy in Baghdad. Nouredine said that Siniora spoke of reconciliation and national unity in Iraq, but refrained from explicitly addressing confessional issues.

[1](#)2. (C) Separately, Nouredine said that the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) is redeploying troops from UNIFIL operations in southern Lebanon to the north to address the security situation in Tripoli and elsewhere. Asserting that the net loss is only 300 troops, she expressed concern that UNIFIL Commander Claudio Graziano would interpret this as LAF inability to carry out its UN Security Council Resolution 1701 responsibilities, and together with the French, could upset Security Council discussions on renewing UNIFIL's mandate. End summary.

MULTI-CONFESSIONAL
DELEGATION OPENS ARMS
TO IRAQ

[1](#)3. (C) One day after Prime Minister Fouad Siniora's August 20 trip to Baghdad, his advisor Rola Nouredine, who had accompanied the PM, briefed Charge Grant and PolOff on their visit. Siniora's delegation included Foreign Minister Fawzi Salloukh, Finance Minister Mohammed Chatah, Information Minister Tareq Mitri, Minister of Administrative Reform Ibrahim Shamseddine, and businessman Marwan Skandar. Nouredine explained that the Shia participation by Salloukh

and Shamseddine served to legitimize the visit as a total Lebanese effort, rather than something based on confession. Of the other cabinet members on the delegation, Siniora and Chatah are Sunnis, while Mitri is a Greek Orthodox Christian.

¶4. (C) The visit opened with a tete-a-tete between Siniora and his Iraqi counterpart Nuri al-Maliki. Then the rest of the delegations joined the meeting. The delegation also met with both the Sunni and Shia Iraqi vice-presidents. After Maliki hosted a luncheon, the delegation departed the International Zone to meet Ayatollah Hakim, who also had received majority leader and MP Saad Hariri during his July 17 visit to Iraq (Ref B). Nouredine noted that they had tried to also see Ayatollah Sistani in Najaf, as Hariri had done, but it was not logistically possible.

¶5. (C) Nouredine said Siniora had invited others from the national unity cabinet who did not attend. Shrugging, she dismissed Energy Minister Alain Tabourian's boycott and public criticism of the trip, attributing it to his election positioning (Tabourian is one of opposition leader Michel Aoun's ministers). Siniora also had invited Hizballah Minister Mohammed Fneish, who (to her relief) declined. Opposition-aligned FM Salloukh had tried without success to discourage the participation of Shamseddine, an independent Shia minister appointed to the cabinet by Siniora, she disclosed.

INVESTING IN IRAQ:
EARLY BIRD CATCHES
THE WORM

BEIRUT 00001234 002 OF 003

¶6. (C) Nouredine highlighted that Siniora's visit marked the second official visit to Iraq by an Arab government leader, after Jordanian King Abdullah. She said the Iraqi counterparts called it an "historic" occasion. Hopeful about future investment opportunities for Lebanon in Iraq, Nouredine seemed most excited that the Lebanese delegation was at the forefront of Iraq's reopening to the Arab world, saying, "The earlier we get in, the better deals we will get."

¶7. (C) Nouredine relayed that FinMin Chatah and his Iraqi finance minister counterpart agreed to form two committees tasked with holding bilateral discussions on tax avoidance and ways to encourage oil field investment. Explaining that they are fast-tracking this partnership, Nouredine said Siniora had said he wanted to return to Baghdad as early as Ramadan (September this year) to sign an agreements.

IMPROVED DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS

¶8. (C) Nouredine added that this visit has raised the level of diplomatic relations between the two countries and will foster an increased exchange in communications. Noting that the Lebanese Embassy in Baghdad is one of the few embassies to have remained open throughout the war and that its Charge is considered a "hero" among Iraqis, she hinted that Lebanon could send an ambassador to Iraq in the near future.

ECONOMIC AGENDA SHOULD
FREE THE PM FROM CRITICISM

¶9. (C) Siniora spoke of reconciliation and national unity in Iraq, Nouredine reported, but refrained from explicitly addressing confessional issues. Because the delegation was multi-confessional and focused on economic issues, she said she suspected the opposition lacked reason to criticize the PM.

"IRAQI GOVERNMENT
MORE ORGANIZED THAN GOL"

¶10. (C) Impressed at the way the Lebanese delegation was received, Nouredine praised what she viewed as a highly-organized Iraqi government. It was apparent that Maliki briefed the vice-presidents on his meeting before the two men were to meet the Lebanese delegation, she said, and that the Iraqi ministers were quite knowledgeable about their portfolios.

LAF REDEPLOYS TROOPS FROM
THE SOUTH TO THE NORTH

¶11. (C) Changing subjects, Nouredine raised the issue of the UNIFIL commander's complaints that the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) has pulled soldiers from UNIFIL's area of operations in the south to deal with security threats in Tripoli in the north and elsewhere. She said that the Higher Council of Defense has decided to increase the LAF presence in Tripoli by redeploying troops from the south, but those troops would be replaced by others. In an email she sent later, she asserted that the net reduction of the LAF's southern presence would be 300 troops.

¶12. (C) She was concerned that UNIFIL Commander General Claudio Graziano would raise this issue to the Security Council during upcoming discussions to extend UNIFIL's mandate, which expires August 31. Expressing Siniora's hope that the Security Council would approve a technical rollover of UNIFIL's mandate, she said she is worried that the French were "unnecessarily" alarmed at the LAF redeployment, and that the French could attempt to suspend discussions on UN Security Council Resolution 1701. Nouredine explained that redeployment procedures occur from time to time, and this should not be interpreted as an inability of the LAF to carry out its 1701 responsibilities to deploy in the south. (Note: The GOL sent a letter to SYG Ban Ki Moon officially

BEIRUT 00001234 003 OF 003

requesting the rollover on August 18, copy emailed to NEA/ELA. End note.)

COMMENT

¶13. (C) The PM's aide highlighted two aspects of Siniora's trip to Iraq. One was the benefit to Lebanon of getting in early, compared to other states in the region, in order to establish relationships that lead to future economic agreements, particularly for energy. The other was that Lebanon is now part of the hoped-for new wave of Arab countries's support for Iraq, following the trip by King Abdallah of Jordan. She considered less important the impact of this trip on Iraqi Shia-Lebanese Shia relations or Shia-Sunni relations in Lebanon. End Comment.
GRANT